Approaching God *in the* Tabernacle

Atoning Blood, Anointing Oil, Burning Incense

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Introduction — God's Pattern for Approaching Him

For many centuries the worship of Israel was inseparably connected with the shedding of sacrificial blood. From the days of the tabernacle in the wilderness to the courts of the temple in Jerusalem, animals were continually offered upon the altar before God. Morning and evening sacrifices were presented each day, additional offerings accompanied the Sabbaths and annual festivals, and individual worshippers regularly brought offerings for sin, purification, thanksgiving, and devotion. Generation after generation the blood of lambs, goats, and bulls flowed upon the altar as the people of God sought reconciliation with Him.

The scale of this sacrificial system was immense. Even the regular daily service required continual offerings upon the altar. During the great feasts of Israel the number of sacrifices increased dramatically. Historical sources from the Second Temple period indicate that during Passover alone vast numbers of lambs were slaughtered for the celebration of the feast. When multiplied across centuries of Israel's worship, the number of animals offered in sacrifice becomes almost unimaginable. The entire religious life of the nation was built around this continual shedding of blood.

Yet the sacrificial system did not begin with the tabernacle. From the earliest pages of Scripture the principle of sacrifice appears whenever humanity approaches God. Abel brought an offering from the firstlings of his flock, and the Lord accepted his sacrifice. Noah built an altar after the flood and offered burnt offerings to the Lord. The patriarchs repeatedly constructed altars and presented sacrifices as they journeyed through the land of promise, and Job regularly offered burnt offerings on behalf of his household. These early sacrifices reveal a fundamental truth embedded in the biblical story: sinful humanity cannot approach a holy God apart from sacrifice.

This principle became fully structured and visible when God commanded Israel to construct the tabernacle in the wilderness. The tabernacle was not merely a place of worship but a divinely revealed pattern through which God taught His people how He was to be approached. Every feature of the sanctuary communicated spiritual meaning, and the entire arrangement demonstrated that access to God required purification, consecration, and mediation.

Among the many elements of the tabernacle service, three stand out with particular significance: the atoning blood of sacrifice, the holy anointing oil, and the burning incense offered before the Lord. These three elements reveal a progression that runs throughout the sanctuary service and ultimately throughout the Scriptures themselves.

First, the atoning blood addressed the fundamental problem of sin. The altar of sacrifice stood at the entrance of the sanctuary, declaring that reconciliation with God begins with atonement. Without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin and no access to the presence of God.

Second, the anointing oil symbolized consecration. The tabernacle, its furnishings, and the priesthood were all set apart through the application of this sacred oil. Those who served in the sanctuary were not merely appointed but consecrated to God's service, marked as belonging entirely to Him.

Third, the burning incense represented prayer and worship rising before God. The fragrant incense offered upon the golden altar symbolized the prayers of God's people ascending before the Lord and expressed the communion that existed between God and those who approached Him according to His appointed way.

Together these three elements portray a movement of spiritual reality: atonement, consecration, and communion.

This sacrificial system continued throughout the entire historical setting of the New Testament. During the ministry of Jesus, the temple sacrifices were still being offered daily. The same was true during the early ministry of the apostles recorded in the book of Acts and during the writing of many of the New Testament epistles. Only with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 did the sacrificial system finally cease.

Yet despite the immense scale and long duration of Israel's sacrificial system, the fundamental problem of sin remained unresolved. Generation after generation animals were offered upon the altar, yet the repetition of these sacrifices testified that the work was never complete. The blood of bulls, goats, and lambs could symbolize atonement, but it could never finally remove the guilt of sin. The entire sacrificial system therefore pointed beyond itself to a greater reality. What the tabernacle proclaimed through countless sacrifices would ultimately be fulfilled through the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ.

2. The Atoning Blood — The Foundation of Approach

The Early History of Sacrifice: Abel, the Patriarchs, and Job

The shedding of sacrificial blood did not begin with the tabernacle or the law of Moses. From the earliest chapters of Scripture, sacrifice appears whenever human beings approach God. The first clear example occurs in the account of Cain and Abel. Abel brought an offering from the firstborn of his flock and of their fat, and the Lord respected Abel and his offering (Gen. 4:4). The offering clearly involved the death of an animal, and the New Testament later confirms the significance of this act when it declares that "by faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (Heb. 11:4). From the beginning, therefore, Scripture presents sacrifice as the appropriate response of sinful humanity in approaching a holy God.

The same pattern appears throughout the patriarchal age. After the flood, Noah built an altar and offered burnt offerings to the Lord, and the Lord received the sacrifice with favor (Gen. 8:20–21). Abraham likewise built altars wherever God revealed Himself to him, offering sacrifices as acts of worship and devotion (Gen. 12:7–8; 13:18). Isaac and Jacob continued this pattern, showing that sacrificial worship was deeply embedded in the life of the people of God long before the tabernacle was constructed.

The book of Job provides another important glimpse into the sacrificial practices of the ancient world. Job regularly offered burnt offerings on behalf of his children, fearing that they might have sinned against God in their hearts (Job 1:5). Even outside the later Mosaic system, the offering of sacrificial blood served as a way of seeking reconciliation with the Lord.

The Passover Lamb and the Establishment of Israel's Sacrificial Worship

The principle of sacrificial blood reached a decisive moment in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. On the night of the Passover, each household of Israel was commanded to take a

lamb without blemish, slaughter it, and apply its blood to the doorposts and lintel of the house (Exod. 12:5–7). When the Lord passed through the land in judgment, the homes marked by the blood were spared. God declared, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exod. 12:13).

Protection from judgment did not depend upon the moral perfection of those inside the house but upon the presence of the blood. The blood of the lamb stood between the people and the judgment that would otherwise fall upon them. In this way the lamb died so that the people might live.

The New Testament explicitly identifies Christ with the Passover sacrifice. Paul writes that "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). Just as the blood of the Passover lamb protected the Israelites from judgment, the blood of Christ delivers believers from the judgment of sin.

The Immense and Continuing Sacrificial System of Israel

When the tabernacle was established in the wilderness, sacrificial worship became a continual institution within the life of Israel. At the entrance of the sanctuary stood the altar of burnt offering, where sacrifices were presented before the Lord. God commanded that two lambs be offered each day as part of the continual burnt offering—one in the morning and one in the evening (Exod. 29:38–39).

Beyond the daily offerings, additional sacrifices accompanied the Sabbath, the new moons, and the major festivals of the religious calendar (Num. 28–29). Individual Israelites also brought offerings throughout the year for sin, purification, thanksgiving, and devotion.

When the temple was later constructed in Jerusalem, this sacrificial system continued on an even larger scale. Pilgrims traveled from throughout the land and from distant regions of the Jewish world to present offerings at the temple. Over the centuries the number of animals sacrificed upon Israel's altar became almost beyond calculation.

Atonement and Expiation in the Old Testament

Within the Old Testament sacrificial system two closely related concepts explain the purpose of sacrifice: atonement and expiation. The Hebrew language often describes sacrifice in terms of "making atonement," a word that carries the sense of covering or reconciliation.

God declared that "the life of the flesh is in the blood," and that the blood had been given upon the altar to make atonement for the soul (Lev. 17:11). Because life resides in the blood, the offering of blood symbolically represented the giving of life in place of the guilty.

Closely related to atonement is the idea of expiation, which refers to the removal or cleansing of sin. If atonement emphasizes the covering of sin before God's holiness, expiation emphasizes the taking away of guilt and defilement from the sinner. The sacrificial blood therefore both covered the offense before God and symbolically removed the impurity that sin brought upon the people.

The rituals of the Day of Atonement illustrate this most clearly. On that day the high priest entered the Most Holy Place with sacrificial blood and sprinkled it upon the mercy seat above the ark of the covenant (Lev. 16:14–16), symbolically covering the sins of the people

before God. At the same time another goat, the scapegoat, bore the sins of Israel away into the wilderness (Lev. 16:21–22), portraying the removal of their guilt from the camp.

The Limitation of Animal Sacrifices

Despite the immense scale and solemnity of Israel's sacrificial system, the sacrifices themselves could never permanently remove sin. Their continual repetition revealed their limitation.

The writer of Hebrews explains that "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). Instead, the sacrifices served as reminders of sin year after year (Heb. 10:3). The altar therefore proclaimed both the necessity of sacrifice and the anticipation of a greater sacrifice yet to come.

Redemption and Propitiation Fulfilled in Christ

The New Testament reveals that the sacrificial system ultimately pointed to the saving work of Christ. Redemption refers to deliverance through the payment of a ransom. Believers are redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18–19).

Propitiation refers to the satisfaction of God's righteous judgment against sin. Paul writes that God set forth Christ as a propitiation by His blood (Rom. 3:25). Through His sacrifice the demands of divine justice are satisfied and reconciliation with God becomes possible.

The Lamb Who Was Slain — The Fulfillment Revealed

The book of Revelation brings the biblical testimony concerning sacrifice to its ultimate conclusion. In John's vision of heaven, Christ appears as "a Lamb as though it had been slain" (Rev. 5:6).

From Abel's offering to the Passover lamb and the sacrifices of the temple, the shedding of blood pointed forward to the final sacrifice of Christ. The heavenly hosts proclaim that through His blood people from every tribe and nation are redeemed to God (Rev. 5:9).

3. The Holy Anointing Oil — Consecration to God

The Sacred Composition of the Anointing Oil

In addition to the sacrifices offered upon the altar, the worship of the tabernacle also involved the use of a sacred anointing oil. This oil was not an ordinary substance but a specially prepared compound created according to precise instructions given by God to Moses. The oil served as a visible sign that certain persons and objects were set apart for the service of the Lord. Through this anointing, the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the priesthood were consecrated to God.

The instructions for the preparation of this oil appear in Exodus 30, where God commanded Moses to take specific spices and blend them with olive oil to produce what Scripture calls "a holy anointing oil" (Exod. 30:25). Unlike ordinary oils used for daily life, this mixture was reserved exclusively for sacred purposes. It could not be reproduced for personal use, and anyone who attempted to copy it for common purposes was to be cut off from the people (Exod. 30:32–33). This restriction emphasized that the oil symbolized something uniquely holy—God's own appointment and consecration.

The ingredients of the oil were carefully measured and combined into a single fragrant compound. The oil consisted of olive oil as the base substance together with liquid myrrh, sweet-smelling cinnamon, calamus (sweet cane), and cassia (Exod. 30:22–24). These spices produced a distinctive fragrance that marked everything associated with the sanctuary. The aroma of the oil itself became a reminder that the service of God was not ordinary but sacred.

The Anointing of the Tabernacle and the Priesthood

Once the oil was prepared, it was used to consecrate the tabernacle and all of its furnishings. The sanctuary itself, along with its vessels and instruments of worship, was anointed so that they would be regarded as holy before the Lord. Through this act the entire tabernacle was dedicated to God's service.

God instructed Moses: "You shall anoint the tabernacle of meeting and the ark of the Testimony; the table and all its utensils, the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense" (Exod. 30:26–27). Even the altar of burnt offering and its utensils were to be anointed (Exod. 30:28). In this way the entire sanctuary—from the outer court to the Most Holy Place—was consecrated through the application of the holy oil.

The priesthood was also established through anointing. Aaron and his sons were set apart for their ministry by the application of the sacred oil upon their heads. "And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister to Me as priests" (Exod. 30:30). The anointing therefore marked both the place of worship and the ministers of worship as belonging to God.

The Meaning of the Ingredients — Christ Foreshadowed

The sacred anointing oil was not a random mixture of fragrant spices. God specified each ingredient and its quantity with great care (Exod. 30:22–25). Because the Scriptures testify of Christ (John 5:39) and the Law points forward to Him (Luke 24:27), the ingredients of the oil invite careful reflection. The oil itself, together with the spices blended into it, forms a compound picture that foreshadows the person and work of Christ.

The foundation of the compound was olive oil. Olive oil served as the base into which all the spices were blended. In the Scriptures oil frequently represents the Spirit of God. Already in the opening lines of the Bible we read that "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). The same Spirit later anointed kings, priests, and prophets for their service. When Samuel anointed David with oil, "the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16:13). Yet oil is produced only through pressing the olives. In ancient presses the fruit was crushed so that the oil could flow. This imagery carries deep resonance with the suffering of Christ. In the Garden of Gethsemane, whose name means "olive press," the Lord endured intense agony as He prepared to offer Himself for the sins of the world (Luke 22:44). In the typology of the anointing oil, the olive oil therefore represents the base of the compound life-giving Spirit of Christ, the Spirit who now communicates divine life to believers (1 Cor. 15:45).

The first spice blended into the oil was myrrh (Exod. 30:23). Myrrh is a precious resin obtained when the bark of a tree is cut or wounded, allowing the fragrant substance to flow out. Because its fragrance comes through injury, myrrh provides a fitting picture of the precious death of Christ. From the beginning of the New Testament narrative myrrh is

associated with the person of Jesus. The wise men presented myrrh among their gifts to the infant Christ (Matt. 2:11), and later Nicodemus brought a mixture containing myrrh to prepare His body for burial (John 19:39). The presence of myrrh in the anointing oil therefore points to the sacrificial death of Christ, through which redemption was accomplished.

Cinnamon, another ingredient in the sacred compound (Exod. 30:23), was a fragrant spice known for its sweetness. In the typological picture of the anointing oil, this sweetness may signify the sweetness and effectiveness of Christ's death. Though the cross was an instrument of suffering and shame, the result of Christ's sacrifice is precious and fragrant before God. The New Testament describes Christ giving Himself for us as "an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Eph. 5:2). Through His death reconciliation with God was accomplished, and the power of sin was broken. Paul therefore writes that "if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom. 8:13). The sweetness of cinnamon thus points to the effective working of Christ's death applied to the believer through the Spirit.

Calamus, the fragrant reed mentioned in the formula (Exod. 30:23), grows upward from muddy and marshy ground. From the mire the plant rises straight and fragrant, producing a stalk valued for its aroma. This characteristic provides a striking picture of the precious resurrection of Christ. The story of redemption does not end with the cross. After His suffering and death, Christ rose again in triumph over the grave. The New Testament declares that God "raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:20). In the typology of the anointing oil, the upward-growing calamus points to this resurrection life rising out of death.

The final spice in the compound was cassia (Exod. 30:24), a strong and penetrating aromatic spice. In ancient times cassia was known for its ability to repel snakes and insects. This characteristic provides a vivid picture of the power of Christ's resurrection. Through His resurrection Christ triumphed over the serpent and over the power of death. Paul expresses his desire to "know Him and the power of His resurrection" (Phil. 3:10). In the typology of the anointing oil, the fragrance of cassia therefore signifies the strong and victorious power of the risen Christ, whose resurrection life overcomes the forces of death and corruption.

Taken together, the olive oil and the spices form a compound anointing oil. In the tabernacle this oil consecrated the sanctuary and the priesthood for the service of God. In the larger testimony of Scripture, however, the compound oil becomes a prophetic portrait of Christ Himself—the Anointed One—and of the life-giving Spirit who flows from Him, enriched by the fragrance of His death and resurrection.

The Anointed One — Christ Fulfillment

The symbolism of the anointing oil ultimately finds its fulfillment in the person of Christ. The very title "Christ" means "the Anointed One." In the Old Testament kings and priests were anointed with oil as a sign of divine appointment, but these anointings pointed forward to the One whom God Himself would anoint.

When Jesus began His public ministry He declared, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18). The New

Testament likewise testifies that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power" (Acts 10:38). Unlike the priests of the Old Testament who were anointed with oil, Christ was anointed directly with the Spirit of God.

Through this anointing Christ became the true Priest who mediates between God and humanity. The sacred oil of the tabernacle therefore served as a prophetic sign pointing forward to the ministry of the Messiah. The sanctuary, the priesthood, and the anointing all anticipated the coming of the One whom God would appoint as the perfect mediator between Himself and His people.

The New Testament further declares that believers share in this anointing through their relationship with Christ. The apostle John writes that those who belong to Christ have received "an anointing from the Holy One" (1 John 2:20) and that this anointing abides in them (1 John 2:27). In this way the symbolism of the sacred oil extends beyond the tabernacle and ultimately reaches the people of God themselves.

4. The Burning Incense — Prayer Before God

The Golden Altar of Incense in the Tabernacle

Within the sanctuary of the tabernacle stood a small but profoundly significant piece of furniture known as the altar of incense. Unlike the bronze altar located in the outer court where sacrifices were offered, the altar of incense stood inside the Holy Place directly before the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (Exod. 30:6). Its position within the sanctuary emphasized its special role in the worship of Israel.

The altar itself was constructed of acacia wood overlaid with gold and measured a cubit in length and width and two cubits in height (Exod. 30:1–3). Like the bronze altar of sacrifice, it possessed horns on its four corners. Each morning and evening the priest would burn incense upon this altar as part of the daily service of the sanctuary.

God commanded Moses: "Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it" (Exod. 30:7–8).

Thus the fragrance of incense rose continually before the Lord as part of Israel's daily worship. The smoke ascending from the golden altar symbolized the devotion and prayer of the people rising toward God.

The order of the tabernacle reveals a spiritual progression:
• the bronze altar addressed the problem of sin through sacrifice
• the anointing oil consecrated the sanctuary and the priesthood
• the incense altar represented communion with God

The Sacred Compound of the Incense

Just as the anointing oil was prepared according to a precise formula, the incense burned upon the golden altar was also a sacred compound. God commanded Moses to prepare a specific mixture of fragrant substances that would be used exclusively in the worship of the tabernacle.

The formula appears in Exodus 30:34: "Take sweet spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, and pure frankincense with these sweet spices; there shall be equal amounts of each."

These four ingredients were blended together to produce a unique and holy incense. Like the anointing oil, this compound was reserved exclusively for the worship of God. Anyone who attempted to reproduce it for common use was to be cut off from the people (Exod. 30:37–38).

The Meaning of the Ingredients

In the typological reading of Scripture, the ingredients of the incense present a profound picture of the death and resurrection of Christ offered before God as a sweet fragrance.

Stacte, a kind of myrrh, was a resinous gum produced by a tree. Because it comes from plant life, it signifies the generating life of Christ released through death. The Lord used plant life to describe this principle: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (John 12:24). Stacte therefore signifies the sweet death of Christ's generating life.

Onycha was derived from the shell of a marine creature found in the marshes of the Red Sea. Because it comes from animal life, it points to Christ's redemptive life given in sacrifice. The Son of Man came to give His life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). Thus onycha signifies the death of Christ with His redemptive life.

Galbanum was a resinous gum that possessed a sharp and somewhat disagreeable odor when considered alone. Yet when blended with the other spices it strengthened their fragrance and caused the fragrance of the incense to endure. This characteristic provides a vivid picture of the powerful death of Christ. The cross appeared offensive and shameful to the world, yet it became the means of salvation. Galbanum was also used to repel insects and poisonous reptiles, including snakes, illustrating the conquering power of Christ's death over the serpent.

Frankincense, the final ingredient, was one of the most valued aromatic resins of the ancient world. When burned it produced a rich fragrance and white smoke rising upward. Frankincense signifies the sweet resurrection of Christ, whose risen life ascends in acceptance before God.

Incense as the Prayers of the Saints

The symbolism of incense becomes clearer as the Scriptures unfold. The rising smoke of incense came to represent the prayers of God's people ascending before Him.

David wrote, "Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (Ps. 141:2).

This connection appears again in the New Testament. When Zechariah entered the temple to burn incense, "the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense" (Luke 1:10).

The Heavenly Incense in the Book of Revelation

The imagery of incense reaches its fullest expression in the book of Revelation. John describes the elders before the throne holding "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Rev. 5:8).

Later another angel stands at the heavenly altar: "The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand" (Rev. 8:4).

Thus the worship of the tabernacle reveals a deeper spiritual reality. The anointing oil signifies Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit coming to us, while the incense signifies Christ as our prayer going to God from us. Through Christ the fellowship between God and His people is fully realized.

5. The Fragrance of Worship Before God

The Sweet Aroma of the Sacrifices

Throughout the Old Testament sacrificial system, the Scriptures repeatedly speak of the offerings as producing a sweet aroma before the Lord. When Noah emerged from the ark after the flood, he built an altar and offered burnt offerings to God. The Scripture records that "the LORD smelled a soothing aroma" (Gen. 8:21). This language appears again and again throughout the book of Leviticus, where the burnt offerings, grain offerings, and peace offerings are described as "an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD" (Lev. 1:9; 2:2; 3:5).

The repetition of this expression reveals that the sacrifices were not merely ritual acts but carried a deeper spiritual significance. The rising smoke and fragrance symbolized the acceptability of the offering before God. Yet these sacrifices could never remove sin permanently. The blood of bulls and goats could only provide a temporary covering (Heb. 10:4). Their true significance lay in pointing forward to the sacrifice of Christ.

In the New Testament the imagery of fragrance is applied directly to the death of Christ. Paul writes that Christ "gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Eph. 5:2). The sacrifices of the Old Testament therefore anticipated the perfect sacrifice of the Son of God, whose death was fully pleasing to the Father.

The Fragrance of the Anointing Oil

The holy anointing oil also carried a distinctive fragrance that marked everything associated with the tabernacle. When the compound oil was applied to the sanctuary and the priesthood, it produced an aroma that set these persons and objects apart for the service of God.

Because the oil typologically represents the life-giving Spirit of Christ, its fragrance points to the richness of Christ Himself. The spices blended into the oil—myrrh, cinnamon, calamus, and cassia—together portray the death and resurrection of Christ and the power that flows from them. When these elements were blended into the olive oil, they produced a compound fragrance that filled the sanctuary.

This imagery reminds us that the Spirit communicates to believers the riches of Christ's person and work. The fragrance of the anointing oil therefore symbolizes the life of Christ imparted to His people through the Spirit. Wherever the Spirit operates, the fragrance of Christ is manifested.

The Fragrance of the Incense

The burning incense produced yet another fragrance within the tabernacle. Unlike the sacrifices offered upon the bronze altar, which were burned in the outer court, the incense

was burned upon the golden altar within the Holy Place. Its fragrance filled the sanctuary and rose upward before the veil.

Because incense came to represent the prayers of the saints, the fragrance of the incense symbolizes the devotion and worship of God's people ascending before Him. As David prayed, "Let my prayer be set before You as incense" (Ps. 141:2). The book of Revelation confirms this interpretation, portraying the prayers of believers as incense rising before the throne of God (Rev. 5:8).

The fragrance of the incense therefore represents the worship and prayer that proceed from the hearts of God's people. Yet even these prayers find their acceptance before God only through Christ, whose sacrifice and resurrection make true communion with God possible.

The Fragrance of Christ

Ultimately all the fragrances of the tabernacle point to one supreme reality—the fragrance of Christ Himself. The sacrifices, the anointing oil, and the incense all foreshadow different aspects of His person and work.

The New Testament declares that believers themselves become bearers of this fragrance. Paul writes: "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (2 Cor. 2:14–15). Paul's language appears to echo the imagery of the Roman triumphal procession, in which a victorious emperor or general was led through the city in celebration. Incense was burned along the route, filling the air with fragrance. Yet that same fragrance carried two very different meanings: to the victors it signified life and celebration, but to the defeated captives being led to judgment it signified death. In a similar way, the knowledge of Christ diffused through the lives of believers becomes a fragrance before God that spreads throughout the world. To those who receive Christ it is the aroma of life, while to those who reject Him it becomes the aroma of death.

Here the imagery of fragrance reaches its fullest spiritual meaning. The life of Christ expressed through His people becomes a spiritual aroma before God and among humanity. Wherever Christ is known, loved, and proclaimed, the fragrance of His life spreads through the world.

Thus the entire worship of the tabernacle—from the sacrifices to the anointing oil to the burning incense—finds its fulfillment in Christ. He is the offering that satisfies God, the Anointed One who gives the Spirit, and the One through whom the prayers of His people ascend to heaven. In Him the fragrance of worship reaches its completion, and through Him that fragrance is carried into the world by those who belong to Him.

6. The Relationship of Blood, Oil, and Incense

Atonement, Consecration, and Communion

When the elements of the tabernacle are viewed together, a clear spiritual pattern emerges. The atoning blood, the holy anointing oil, and the burning incense are not isolated features of Israel's worship but parts of a unified revelation concerning how humanity may approach

God. Each element represents a distinct stage in the divine order of fellowship between God and His people.

The atoning blood forms the foundation of this approach. Because humanity is fallen and sinful, access to the presence of God cannot occur without the removal of sin. From the earliest pages of Scripture the shedding of blood was established as the means by which sinners could draw near to God. Abel offered a sacrifice from the firstborn of his flock (Gen. 4:4), and throughout the centuries the patriarchs continued to approach God through sacrifice. This pattern reached its fullest expression in the sacrificial system of Israel, where the bronze altar stood at the entrance of the tabernacle court. There the blood of sacrifices was shed continually as a testimony that sin required atonement.

Yet the blood of animals could never permanently remove sin. The sacrifices of the Old Testament were shadows pointing forward to the true sacrifice that would one day come. That sacrifice was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Through His death the barrier between God and humanity was removed, and the way into the presence of God was opened.

Following the sacrifice comes consecration through the anointing oil. In the tabernacle the holy anointing oil was applied to the sanctuary and the priesthood, marking them as belonging to God. Typologically this oil signifies Christ as the life-giving Spirit who is imparted to believers. Through the Spirit the riches of Christ's death and resurrection become the life and experience of God's people.

The final element in this progression is communion expressed through the burning incense. The fragrant smoke rising from the golden altar symbolizes the prayers and worship of the saints ascending before God. Having been redeemed through the blood and consecrated through the Spirit, believers may now draw near to God in prayer and fellowship.

Thus the three elements reveal a divine order: atonement through the blood, consecration through the Spirit, and communion through prayer. Together they describe the spiritual reality of the believer's relationship with God.

The Movement of Approaching God

The physical arrangement of the tabernacle reveals a clear and ordered progression in approaching God. Each object encountered along the way illustrates a necessary step in drawing near to Him.

When a worshiper entered the outer court, the first object encountered was the bronze altar, where sacrifices were offered. This altar declared that sinful man cannot approach a holy God apart from the shedding of blood. Atonement had to be made before any further approach was possible. The altar therefore speaks of the redemptive death of Christ, whose blood removes the barrier of sin and opens the way to God.

After the altar stood the laver, filled with water for washing. The priests who had already been accepted through sacrifice still needed to be cleansed before ministering in the sanctuary. This washing signifies the ongoing cleansing of the believer. While the altar speaks of forgiveness through Christ's blood, the laver speaks of purification through the

washing of water in the Word and the inward cleansing of the Spirit. Redemption alone is not the end; those who serve God must also be cleansed in their daily walk.

Beyond the laver the priests entered the Holy Place, where the service of God was carried out. **Here the holy anointing oil had consecrated both the tabernacle and the priesthood for divine service**. This anointing signifies the Holy Spirit. Through Christ, believers are not only redeemed and cleansed but also anointed and set apart for God. The Spirit enables them to live and serve in the presence of God.

Within the Holy Place stood the golden altar of incense, positioned directly before the thick veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. At this altar the fragrant incense continually ascended before the Lord. The incense represents the sweetness and acceptability of Christ Himself. Because Christ is pleasing to God, the prayers and worship of believers rise before the Father in Him as a fragrant offering.

Although the altar of incense stood physically in the Holy Place, the writer of Hebrews associates it directly with the Most Holy Place (Hebrews 9:3–4). This connection is significant. The altar of incense functioned in relation to the presence of God behind the veil. The fragrance of the incense rose before the mercy seat, indicating that prayer and worship ultimately belong to the sphere of God's immediate presence.

Beyond the veil lay the Most Holy Place, the very center of the tabernacle, where the ark of the testimony rested beneath the mercy seat. **Associated with the ark were three significant items: the tablets of the covenant, the golden pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded.** Each of these bears a profound testimony concerning Christ.

The **tablets of the law** represent God's righteous requirements. In Christ these requirements are perfectly fulfilled. He alone embodies God's righteousness and becomes the living expression of God's law written not merely on stone but in the hearts of His people.

The **golden pot of manna** represents the hidden bread preserved before God. Manna sustained Israel in the wilderness, and it points to Christ as the true bread from heaven. He is the life that nourishes God's people inwardly. Just as the manna was preserved in God's presence, so Christ is the eternal life given to believers and maintained before God for His people.

Aaron's rod that budded signifies resurrection life and divine priestly authority. The rod was originally a dead staff belonging to Aaron, but in a single night it budded, blossomed, and produced almonds. This miracle occurred after the rebellion of Korah, when many in Israel challenged the authority of Moses and Aaron. God caused Aaron's rod to bring forth life as a decisive sign that the priesthood had been appointed by Him alone. The rod was then placed before the testimony as a lasting reminder to the people.

Yet the narrative also contains a remarkable note of grace. Although Korah himself perished in judgment, Scripture later records that the sons of Korah did not die. They remained faithful and were preserved by God. In later generations these descendants became singers and worship leaders in Israel, and several Psalms are attributed to them. Thus the family connected with rebellion eventually became voices of worship in the house of God.

In its deepest meaning, Aaron's budding rod points to Christ. Just as the rod demonstrated divine authority through life emerging from what was dead, so Christ's priesthood is confirmed through resurrection. His authority as the true High Priest rests not on human appointment but on the power of an indestructible life.

Taken together, the contents associated with the ark present a rich testimony of Christ in the presence of God: the law fulfilled in Him, the hidden manna as the life He gives, and the budding rod revealing His resurrection priesthood.

Thus the entire tabernacle reveals a spiritual movement toward God: redemption through the blood at the altar, cleansing at the laver, consecration through the anointing, communion through the incense, and finally the testimony of Christ in the presence of God within the veil. What was once expressed through the tabernacle finds its full reality in Christ. Through Him believers draw near to God and experience redemption, cleansing, anointing, fellowship, and the living testimony of divine life in His presence.

7. Conclusion — The Testimony of the Tabernacle Fulfilled in Christ

The tabernacle of Israel was far more than a temporary structure used for ancient worship. It was a divinely designed testimony that pointed forward to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Every altar, every sacrifice, and every fragrant offering within the sanctuary foreshadowed the realities that would later be fulfilled in Him.

The atoning blood revealed the necessity of sacrifice for the removal of sin. From the offerings of Abel to the continual sacrifices of the tabernacle and temple, the shedding of blood testified that sin required judgment and that reconciliation with God demanded a substitute. This long history of sacrifice ultimately pointed to Christ, whose death accomplished once for all what the blood of animals could never achieve.

The holy anointing oil revealed the consecration that follows redemption. Through this oil the sanctuary and the priesthood were set apart for the service of God. In the New Testament this reality is fulfilled through Christ, the Anointed One, who gives the life-giving Spirit to His people. Through the Spirit believers are joined to Christ and become participants in His life.

The burning incense then revealed the communion that flows from redemption and consecration. The fragrant smoke rising before the veil symbolized the prayers and worship of God's people ascending before Him. In the book of Revelation this imagery appears again in the heavenly sanctuary, where the prayers of the saints rise before the throne of God like incense (Rev. 5:8; 8:3–4).

Thus the entire pattern of the tabernacle finds its fulfillment in Christ. The atoning sacrificial blood offered upon Israel's altar pointed forward to the shedding of the precious blood of Christ, through which eternal redemption has been accomplished. The holy anointing oil likewise foreshadowed Christ as both the Anointed One and the anointing One who imparts the life-giving Spirit to His people. The burning incense also points to Christ, whose sweetness and acceptability rise before the Father and through Whom the prayers of His people ascend as a fragrant offering. Through Him the ancient symbols of the tabernacle become present spiritual realities, and the way into God's presence stands open forever.